

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

- 1    1.    A method to authenticate a media stream recipient, comprising:  
2            automatically receiving an authentication request from a media player  
3    when a recipient attempts to use the media player to play a media stream,  
4    and wherein the media player is part of the media stream;  
5            verifying that the recipient is authorized to play the media stream; and  
6            sending an authentication token to the media player, if the recipient is  
7    authorized.
- 1    2.    The method of claim 1 wherein the sending further comprises  
2    automatically installing the authentication token as a licensing key on a  
3    computing device of the recipient, wherein the licensing key can include  
4    licensing limitations.
- 1    3.    The method of claim 1 wherein in automatically receiving, the  
2    recipient initially obtains the media player and media stream from a second  
3    recipient.
- 1    4.    The method of claim 1 wherein in verifying, the recipient is verified by  
2    externally contacting a licensing service with at least one of an identity of the  
3    recipient and an identification of the media stream.
- 1    5.    The method of claim 1 wherein in sending, the authentication token  
2    includes limitations that instruct the media player to self destruct the media  
3    stream upon the occurrence of an event or pre-defined time.
- 1    6.    The method of claim 1 wherein in sending, the authentication token  
2    includes limitation that instruct the media player to prevent the recipient from  
3    re-streaming the media stream to a downstream recipient.

1 7. The method of claim 1 wherein in sending, the authentication token is  
2 at least one of a digital certificate and a digital signature.

1 8. A media stream structure residing on a computer readable medium,  
2 comprising:

3 media player logic;

4 media content; and

5 media recipient authentication logic included with the media player  
6 logic;

7 wherein when the media stream data structure is received by a  
8 computing device, the media player logic automatically installs itself on the  
9 computing device and executes the media recipient authentication logic  
10 before playing the media content, and wherein the media recipient  
11 authentication logic sends an authentication request to an authentication  
12 service along with the identity of a recipient of the media content.

1 9. The media stream data structure of claim 8 wherein the media  
2 recipient authentication logic also sends an identification of the media  
3 content to the authentication service.

1 10. The media stream data structure of claim 8 further comprising an  
2 authentication token, which is added to the media stream data structure if  
3 the identity of the recipient is authorized to play the media content on the  
4 computing device by the authentication service.

1 11. The media stream data structure of claim 10, wherein the  
2 authentication token is stored external to the media stream data structure  
3 and is identified within the media stream data structure as a pointer  
4 reference.

1 12. The media stream data structure of claim 8 wherein the media  
2 recipient authentication logic also sends at least one of settings associated  
3 with a computing environment of the computing device and an Internet  
4 Protocol (IP) address associated with the computing device to the  
5 authentication service.

1 13. The media stream data structure of claim 8 wherein the  
2 authentication service authenticates the identity of the recipient by  
3 interfacing with one or more external licensing services.

1 14. The media stream data structure of claim 8 wherein the media player  
2 automatically plays the media content if a valid authentication token is  
3 received from the authentication service.

1 15. A media content authentication system, comprising:  
2 a distribution service for distributing media streams, wherein each  
3 media stream includes media content and a self-installing media player; and  
4 an authentication service that subsequently communicates with each  
5 media player in order to authenticate access to recipients that attempts to  
6 play the media content.

1 16. The media content authentication system of claim 15 wherein each  
2 media player that self-installs contacts the authentication service  
3 immediately after it initially installs on a recipient's computing device.

1 17. The media content authentication system of claim 15 wherein each  
2 media player receives an authentication token from the authentication  
3 service, if a corresponding recipient is authorized to play the media content.

1 18. The media content authentication system of claim 15 wherein the  
2 authentication service uses a licensing service to authorize a number of the  
3 recipients for access to the media content.

1 19. The media content authentication system of claim 15 wherein the  
2 authentication service receives information from each of the media players  
3 that is used to authenticate each of the recipients, and the information  
4 includes at least one of settings of a computing environment that is  
5 executing the media player, an identity of the recipient, and an identification  
6 of the media content.

1 20. The media content authentication system of claim 15 wherein the  
2 authentication service returns authentication tokens to each of the media  
3 players that have authorized recipients and the authentication tokens are at  
4 least one of a digital certificates, digital signatures, encrypted data, and  
5 hidden data.